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## Longtime Navy Medicine Historian Receives Prestigious Forrest Pogue Award

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**By André Sobocinski, Historian, Bureau of Medicine and Surgery (BUMED)**



Military Historian Forrest C. Pogue accepts award from Marine Historian Benis Frank in 1979 for excellence in oral history.

Oral histories are basic tools used to capture first-hand accounts and memories of particular events, time periods, as well as personal and career experiences.



The very existence of this program can be credited to longtime BUMED Historian,

For the last thirty years, Bureau of Medicine (BUMED) has operated an active [oral history program](#) designed to document Navy Medicine's own stories for posterity. The very existence of this program can be credited to longtime BUMED Historian, Jan K. Herman.

On April 9, 2015, Herman was awarded the prestigious Forrest C. Pogue Award for excellence in oral history at the annual [Mid-Atlantic Oral History Association Region \(OHMAR\) Conference](#) in Camden, New Jersey.

Named after World War II Army oral historian [Forrest C. Pogue](#) who helped pioneer the practice of capturing historical interviews "fresh off the battlefield", the award has been given by [OMHAR](#) annually since 1979 as a lifetime achievement in the field of oral history.

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Jan K. Herman.

While serving as BUMED Historian from 1979 until his retirement in 2012, Herman established a robust oral history program for documenting the career experiences

of Navy Medical personnel, both active duty and retired. The program began with an interview conducted with Wheeler Lipes, a former Independent Duty Corpsman who performed a lifesaving appendectomy aboard the submarine *Seadragon* in 1942.

"I tracked him down and he agreed to be interviewed about his experiences," Herman recalled. "I remember I used a cheap cassette recorder which I held up to the phone. It was real high tech."

Herman would go on to befriend Lipes and, with many other interview subjects, develop bonds that would last a lifetime.

"The Lipes interview was certainly one of my favorites because it turned into a lifelong friendship," Herman related. "In his later years we would talk every week or so and I would always ask him if I could record it. These conversations afforded ample opportunities to capture additional stories about life in the submarine service and even tales about meeting luminaries like Albert Einstein."

Over the years, Herman sought out other medical veterans, each with their own stories and each another part of Navy Medicine's historical mosaic.

In his 33 years as medical historian, Herman would capture hundreds of first-hand accounts of medical personnel who had been prisoners of war, received the Medal of Honor, and served in the very battles and events that have helped defined the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps—from [Midway](#) to [Okinawa](#), the [Chosin Reservoir](#) to [Khe Sanh](#).

Herman adapted many of these narratives into articles, books and films, including the six-part World War II documentary series, [Navy Medicine at War](#).

"This award is being given to Jan Herman for his pioneering work in Navy Medicine education," said Dr. David Winkler, Naval Historical Foundation Historian and member of [OMHAR](#). "For over thirty years Herman was able to use these interviews as teaching tools for understanding the past."

Herman admits the award is tremendous honor but as he joked, "I had always had my sights set on a Nobel, but for an oral historian this is my Nobel and I feel honored to receive it."

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For more on [Navy Medical Oral Histories](#) and the [BUMED Oral History Project](#) please click on link below.

<http://www.med.navy.mil/bumed/nmhhistory/Pages/Oral-History.aspx>

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